

FAMILY STORY

BURGLARIES AT BOURGEOISVILLE.

IF Detective Sergeant Collie had arrived sooner he might have been able to discover a workable clue, he thought, but when he was called in the burglary was three days old. It was only after the local police had done their best and failed that they applied to Scotland Yard for help, and that the clever detective sergeant was sent to Bourgeoisville.

By that time the local police, under the able direction of Inspector Boodle, had succeeded pretty well in obliterating everything which might have served as a clue to the sergeant. Enough, however, still remained to show him that the burglary was not the work of amateurs, but of professionals. The way in which Mr. St. John-Smith's powerful plate safe had been forced was really a charming piece of workmanship, and excited the detective's warmest admiration, and the rapidity and noiselessness with which the massive silver plate had been removed, and the reception-rooms stripped of their valuables—including paintings, bronzes and other not easily portable articles—proved the person concerned to possess the highest and rarest skill known to the trade.

Although Sergeant Collie thought he might have been able to do something had he been called in immediately, yet he fully realized that it was no great discredit to the local police that they had failed to trace the guilty persons. It was clear that from the first there was little to indicate who these were. Not a single suspicious-looking man or woman had been seen in the neighborhood for weeks, and yet it seemed as if those who committed the burglary had thorough knowledge not merely of the country about, but of the house and the habits of its inmates. Not a single suspicious-looking vehicle had been seen on any of the roads about the pillaged house, or, indeed, about Bourgeoisville, or the village, as it was called, which was nearly a mile distant, on the night of the burglary, and yet the number and weight of the articles were such as to render it highly improbable that they were carried off without the help of a vehicle of some sort. The policeman whose beat lay along the London road, off which the pillaged mansion was situated, had seen the ordinary number of vehicles during that night, but they all obviously belonged to "carriage people" in the neighborhood. There was not a van, dog cart or other likely conveyance among them.

Sergeant Collie spent a whole fortnight searching for anything that might promise a clue to the solution of the mystery. He examined and cross-examined Mr. St. John-Smith's numerous servants. He searched the grounds of "Longest"—the plundered mansion—and of the neighboring houses most minutely in the hope of finding some traces of the missing property. He questioned everybody who lived in the neighborhood and who within the past month had visited the house. But he discovered nothing. At the end of the fortnight Sergeant Collie reported to headquarters that he had done all he could, and had completely failed to trace the criminals. As he was convinced that further investigation on the spot—at least, for the present—was useless, he was recalled to town. Before leaving Bourgeoisville he impressed on Inspector Boodle the necessity of reporting the affair at once if another crime of the same kind occurred in or about the village.

Sergeant Collie had not returned to town above two or three weeks before a telegram was received at Scotland Yard from the respected Inspector Boodle. It ran as follows: "Burglary last night at Chatsworth, seat of Mr. St. James-Jones. Similar in all respects to that at Longest, seat of Mr. St. John-Smith. Immense robbery. Send help." Within half an hour of the receipt of this telegram Sergeant Collie was in the train bound for Bourgeoisville.

A rapid investigation showed the detective that Inspector Boodle's description of the burglary was absolutely correct. The second burglary corresponded with the first in every detail. It was executed with the same skill and daring; the thieves had forced with the same dexterity an equally strong plate safe, and had removed with the same rapidity and noiselessness an equally large amount of plate and valuables, and finally they had left as few traces by which they might be followed up and identified. Sergeant Collie, after three hours' most careful and intelligent inspection of the house, its grounds, and everything in the neighborhood which by any possibility could throw light on the mystery, felt compelled to acknowledge that he was as much at sea as to how or by whom the burglary had been perpetrated as the local police had been in the last case.

Indeed, the only point that even looked like a clue had been discovered by the local police. Toward evening, when the detective was weary and disappointed by his labors, Inspector Boodle came to him with a very mysterious air, and told him that he had found an important clue. This turned out to be a story told by the groom of the doctor at the village, who had been attending one of Mr. St. James-Jones' family. This fellow said that, on coming to Chatsworth the previous day with a bottle of medicine, he had noticed a shabbily dressed man hanging about the laurels at the side of the lawn. This person, when he saw he was observed, hurriedly made off. Sergeant Collie had the footman before him for examination. It was then made clear that the intruder on the lawn was merely a common tramp. The detective, on making sure of this, dismissed the footman and his story with contempt. He was certain of little as regards the burglary save this, that it was the work of a tramp, but of men carefully trained in that line of business, who had planned out

every detail in it before taking the job in hand.

One or two points in the burglary had carefully struck the detective. In the first place the plate safe in Chatsworth was built into the kitchen wall, yet the burglars had gone straight to it in this unusual place. Again, a minute examination of the footprints outside the house and it had convinced the officer that two or, at the most, three, persons had been engaged in the job. Thirdly, the plunder carried away—and carried away with amazing rapidity—must have weighed the best part of twenty tons. And, lastly, there was not the slightest evidence to show that a horse and vehicle of any kind had been used to remove the plunder. As before, the usual number of private carriages had been seen passing along London road, but nothing beyond that.

To the detective's mind all these peculiar circumstances could point to only one conclusion, namely, that the burglars had been in the house before they went there to commit the burglary, and that they must live somewhere in the immediate neighborhood of the scene of the burglary. Accordingly, he directed his inquiries as to the persons who had lately been visiting the servants' hall at Chatsworth.

These he found consisted pretty exclusively of tradesmen and the maids' sweethearts. The former were all ultra-respectable men who had been living in the village for years back, yet the detective thought it wise to inspect the premises of all of them. They raised no objection, and he made no discovery. As to the sweethearts, he found that all the maids had recognized lovers, who were allowed by Mrs. St. James-Jones a pretty free run of the servants' hall. Among them was the policeman on whose beat London road was. He informed the detective who the other lovers were, and assured him that no new admirers had been hanging round the place of late. "I'd have seen 'em if they 'ad," he said, "and the maids would 'ave done so, too. She's a very systematic lady. She halves each of 'er mides one sweet'art and no more. When the gal 'as got one, too, she won't stand poshing. No, b'm sure there weren't no other men about." And the men who were about, the detective soon ascertained, were all as respectable and above suspicion as the constable himself.

Sergeant Collie occupied a full fortnight in these inquiries. At the end of that time he had to confess that he was not an inch nearer the solution of the mystery of the burglaries than ever. He again reported to headquarters that further investigation seemed useless, and requested to be recalled.

He was awaiting an answer from Scotland Yard, when, early one morning, he was aroused by Inspector Boodle rushing excitedly into his bedroom. The officer brought news of another burglary. This time the victim was St. George-Robinson. The mansion broken into was called Hatfield and lay on the opposite side of the village to the other two plundered houses.

Exasperated at this repetition of the burglaries under his very nose, Sergeant Collie set out hurriedly with Inspector Boodle for Hatfield, fiercely resolved to leave no trace unturned in his efforts to trace the perpetrators. As they hastened along the road—the house was some half-mile from the village—the sergeant cross-questioned his companion as to the character of the poor people who lived in the neighborhood of Hatfield. When he had got all the information he could he became silent. Suddenly, when they were not far from the house, he came to a dead stop.

"Hurrah!" he cried, delightedly, "we'll nab them this time!" "How? Why? What makes you think that?" asked the inspector, amazed. "Don't you see this?" replied Sergeant Collie, walking across the road and picking up a horseshoe. "Look—my boy—good luck!"

The inspector's amazement turned into annoyance.

"Is that all?" he said. "I thought you were wiser than to pay attention to such old women's notions as that."

"You'll see we'll nab them," cried the sergeant exultantly, as he pocketed the horseshoe. "I never felt more certain of anything."

The inspector made no reply; he was too disgusted at his colleague's folly. They were now close to Hatfield. On going into the house they found everything and everybody there in the wildest confusion. The family were away from home, and the housekeeper, terrified lest she might in some way be held responsible for it, was in so excited a condition that the policeman found it useless to question her. From her daughter, however, who was the only other person staying in the house, he learned that the burglars on this occasion had been disturbed in their work, and that they had hastily to leave the house before they could force the plate safe. Dawn was just beginning to break when the alarm took place. The housekeeper and her daughter had sprung out of bed and run to the window to call for help. The burglars by this time were running helter-skelter down the side of the lawn to some trees which separated Hatfield—which was on the by-road—from a field occupied as a dairy farm, and opening into the main road. The women had only a glance at them, and could give no very definite description of them. All they could say was that there were two men—one looking something like a stableman, the other more like a clerk in dress. A remark of the younger woman, however, struck the detective sergeant as of more importance than her description of the burglar. She said that the man who was dressed like a stableman seemed like somebody she could not remember.

The alarm had arisen through the

barking of a little fox-terrier which was sleeping in a basket in the hall of the house. Usually two dogs were kept there—the fox-terrier and a big mastiff; but when the family went to the seaside for the benefit of their only child's health, the little girl asked to have her dogs with her, and the doctor who was attending her advised that her wish should be granted, as she was much attached to the animals and might fret if parted from them. The mother assented; but, at the last moment, the father insisted that one should be left behind for the protection of the house. To this fortunate circumstance it was due that the burglary was discovered before the house-breakers could secure their plunder.

Collie and Inspector Boodle spent several hours in a most exhaustive examination. At the end of it one or two things seemed clear enough. As before, it was clear the burglars were adepts in their business; as before, it was clear, too, that they knew well the interior of the house; and, as before, there was not a trace or a mark to show who they were or where they came from.

When they gave over the investigation for the day they walked back to the village both deeply depressed, and one reflecting deeply. The latter was Sergeant Collie. After he reached his lodgings he sat quietly for some time, reflecting still. Then he rose, put on his overcoat, and walked down to the village farm. The blacksmith was still at the forge, though it was now evening. Sergeant Collie, who knew him slightly, bade him good-day.

"Had a busy day?" the sergeant then asked the blacksmith.

"Pretty well—pretty well," answered Vulcan. "This weather, you see, makes the roads plaguy heavy, and there's a lot of shoes dropped."

"I thought so," answered Collie. "I myself found one." He took the shoe out of his pocket.

"Ay, ay," said the blacksmith, looking at the shoe; "fore off, I should say. I had three of them to-day."

"Any of them about the size of that?"

"All of 'em, I should say," answered the blacksmith.

"Whose were they?"

"Let me see. Yes. Farmer Oake's mare, the carrier's pony, and—and I should say the third was Dr. Fell's gelding—yes, it was."

"What sort of a man is the carrier?" asked Collie.

"Old Fardell? One of the best old souls living," said the blacksmith. "He's lived in the village since it was started. I think—remembers when there wasn't a big house within three miles, except the old manor house, which was pulled down by St. John-Smith, three years ago. He's getting past work, I'm afraid."

The detective sat in silence for a minute or two. Then he said, "I don't feel at all well to-night."

"I thought you was looking a bit glum," said the blacksmith.

"I'll go home, I think, and get to bed."

The detective went home and went to bed. Before he was long there he directed his landlady to send for Dr. Fell, and ask him to come as quickly as possible, as the case was urgent. In spite of this intimation, Dr. Fell was not particularly quick in coming, and by the time he arrived the detective seemed very ill, indeed. He made the doctor feel his pulse, examine his tongue and try the state of his lungs and heart. Then the doctor left, saying it was merely a gastric attack, and promising to send him some medicine.

When the doctor was gone Collie sat up in his bed and reflected.

"I have seen him before," he said to himself. "Was it a witness in a stabbing case, or what? Let me see, now. He's altered, of course; but I feel sure I know him." He paused and thought again. Then he suddenly jumped out of bed. "I'll swear it. It's Jack Howe, the forger, or I'm an ass!"

Half an hour later the doctor, his coachman and footman were in custody on charges of breaking into and stealing from the houses of Messrs. St. John-Smith, St. James-Jones, and St. George-Robinson, and half the plunder of those burglaries had been found by the police safely stowed away in the doctor's house and stables.

At the assizes Dr. Fell and his associates were tried and convicted of the three burglaries. The story of Fell was then made public. His real name was Jack Howe. He had been a medical student in London, and, from which he had been expelled for dishonesty. One of his chums had succeeded, however, in getting a diploma. This man, who was as disreputable as Howe himself, was called Fell. Shortly after his expulsion, Howe was convicted of forgery and sent to penal servitude. While he was serving his sentence Fell died, or, at any rate, disappeared. On his discharge, Howe became aware of this fact, and calmly appropriated his missing friend's diploma and name, started practice at Bourgeoisville as a doctor. His former training as a medical student enabled him to carry out the imposture with complete success. Unfortunately his old criminal associates found him out, and, willingly or unwillingly, on his part, made him their chief in carrying out a regular scheme of burglaries. His professional position diverted suspicion from him and them, while his brougham was used to remove the plunder, and his residence to store it till it could be safely disposed of.

"You see now," said Collie to Inspector Boodle, "the horseshoe proved lucky after all."—London Truth.

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